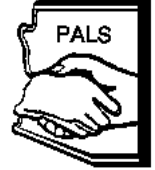




Parent Information Network



Conference Attendance Tips for Families and Students

by Becky Raabe

Where to find conferences and workshops -

1. *Newsletters and journals*
 - Subscribe to print and email publications
2. *Websites*
 - Regularly check disability-specific and education-related websites
3. *Newspapers*
 - Community events section of your local newspaper
4. *Message boards*
 - Look for announcements on bulletin boards at health clinics, schools, and community centers
5. *Ask*
 - Families, students, parent group leaders, educators and providers if they know about upcoming conferences and training events
6. *Network*
 - Let people know they should contact you when they hear of events that pertain to your area(s) of interest

Before the conference or workshop -

1. *Complete registration forms*
 - Send before the cut-off date.
 - If necessary, request reasonable accommodations, special diet and/or assistive technology.
 - Inquire about scholarships that may be available for families or students.
2. *Confirm your registration*
 - Ask for a letter of confirmation or registration #.
 - Keep a copy of the registration form.
3. *Request an agenda*
 - Confirm start, meal, break and end times.
 - Highlight the workshops you're interested in attending.
 - If you are attending with someone else, consider going to separate breakout sessions and after the event share information and resources.
4. *Arrange transportation and lodging*
 - Car pool with other people who are attending the conference.
 - Locate public transportation routes to the location.
 - If you are driving to an unfamiliar location, ask conference planners for travel and parking directions.
 - Find out where wheelchair accessible entrances and restrooms are located if needed.
 - Ask the hotel about special rates available to guests attending the conference.

5. *Label all your belongings*
 - Take everything with you when you leave each session. It's easy to leave something behind.
 - Take a backpack or tote bag for conference materials.
6. *Consider the purpose of your attendance.*
 - Plan session attendance and exhibit visits that appear to offer the information you are looking for.
 - If you don't find the information you need, ask conference planners and vendors if they can suggest sessions or exhibit booths.
 - Ask family members, teachers and service providers if they have something they would like you to look for, or learn about, at the conference. This is a good way to expand your support network and involve others in helping you plan future supports and services.

Take along -

1. *Registration materials*
 - Your confirmation letter or a copy of your registration form may be necessary to register.
 - Take your agenda and any notes you have made in preparation for the event.
2. *Pens or pencils, highlighter marker, post-it-notes*
 - Markers are useful to highlight points of interest in handouts and sessions you plan on attending.
3. *Note paper, laptop or pocket personal computer, or other note taking device*
 - Expect to gather more information than you can possibly remember without taking notes.
4. *A clip board or other portable writing surface*
 - Seating may be in theater-style, which leaves you to supply your own writing surface.
5. *Address labels*
 - Save yourself time by attaching your personalized address label to sign-in sheets, information cards and raffle tickets.
6. *Tote bag*
 - A canvas or heavy plastic tote bag is handy for collecting meeting handouts and exhibit brochures.
7. *Camera*
 - Not only is it fun to take pictures of friends you meet at a conference, it's also nice to take pictures of exhibits and demonstrations. Be sure to ask first for permission from exhibitors and presenters before taking the picture.
8. *Tape recorder*
 - Use a tape recorder to keep details of your thoughts about workshops and exhibits you see. Ask the speaker for permission before you record a presentation.
9. *Watch*
 - To keep track of time. You don't want to miss attending conference meetings and important events.
10. *Money*
 - You may have to pay for meals and snacks not provided by the conference host.
11. *Comfort Items*
 - Take a sweater since meeting rooms are often cold, even when the outside temperature is hot.
 - Wear comfortable shoes if you plan on visiting the exhibit area and know that meeting rooms are spread out in the conference facility.
 - A water bottle and snacks may come in handy.

12. *Assistive Devices*

- Don't forget your assistive technology (i.e., magnifier, hearing aide, etc.).
- Take extra batteries or a charger for electronic devices.

When you arrive at the conference -

1. *Locate the registration desk*
 - Pick up your conference materials at the registration desk.
 - Confirm requested special accommodations.
 - Find out who and where the conference support people are in case you have questions or concerns.
2. *Review the agenda*
 - Times and locations of events may have changed from the original materials you received.
3. *Find*
 - Conference meeting rooms, exhibit areas, meal location(s), lost and found, rest areas, drinking fountains, restrooms, telephones or locate them on a map of the facility. (Use the restroom and get a drink before workshops start.)
 - It's a good idea to choose a meeting place if you are attending with a group of people.
4. *Identification*
 - Wear your name badge to gain entrance to events and to make introductions easier
 - Put your meal ticket(s) and special event ticket(s) in a safe and easy-to-find location.

During the conference -

1. *Turn off or mute your cell phone*
2. *Find a good seat*
 - Sit in a location that has adequate light for note taking.
 - Make sure you can see and hear the speaker.
 - Avoid sitting behind audio visual equipment that may block your view of the speaker and screen.
3. *Ask questions*
 - The speaker may request that questions and comments be saved until the end of the session so be prepared to jot down your questions during the presentation.
 - Don't hesitate to ask the speaker to clarify their comments or use of acronyms.
4. *Complete session and conference evaluations.* Your comments make a difference.
5. *Be flexible*
 - Find an alternate workshop if the session you wanted to see is too crowded, cancelled or just isn't a topic that interests you.
6. *Network*
 - Conferences are excellent learning opportunities.
 - Some of the best networking happens before, during and after sessions.
 - Don't hesitate to meet new people during breaks and meal times.
7. *Check out exhibits*
 - Plan plenty of time to visit exhibits.
 - Ask exhibitors to explain what they have to offer or to demonstrate their products.
 - Tell vendors the types of information, products or services you are seeking.
 - Look for information that you need now, but don't overlook something that may be useful in the future.
 - Gather information for someone you know who may be interested in the resource.

- Pick up brochures and fliers. If you don't have time to talk to vendors refer to brochures at home for information and contact numbers.
- Accept exhibitors 'freebies.' They're handy reminders of available programs and services. There may be good 'treats' to take home to the family. And, they are good door prizes at parent / teacher meetings or student meetings.
- Ask to be added to mailing lists and listservs.

8. *Schedule rest times*; attending a conference can be exhausting.

After the conference -

1. *Review session handouts and exhibit brochures*

- Add your afterthoughts to workshop notes.
- Contact presenters and exhibitors for additional information.
- File resources with other similar documents you have.
- Make copies of resources to distribute to other families, students, teachers and providers.
- Attend a local parent, student, or professional meeting to talk about your experience and share information. Take copies of the program, workshop handouts and exhibit brochures.
- Make plans to attend another conference or workshop!

These PIN Clearinghouse Resources are useful to locate organizations that host conferences and workshops;

GR01 PIN Trainings and Workshops (descriptions of workshops)

GR05 National Website Listings

GR06 Websites with Resources in Other Languages

GR07 PIN Blue Pages: Disability Related Resources (directory of AZ and national organizations)

GR14 Where to Find Resources and Information On Special Education and Disability Related Issues

The above resources can be downloaded from <http://www.ade.az.gov/ess/pinspals/> or are available from your regional PIN Specialist.

Additional training opportunities are available online from:

Arizona Department of Education website; <http://www.ade.az.gov/onlineregistration/>, then search the Exceptional Student Services link.

EAPN (Enhancing Arizona's Parent Networks) website; www.ade.az.gov/ess/eapn

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